International Agency for Research on Cancer

World Health Organization

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IARC Monographs evaluate consumption of red meat and processed meat

Lyon, France, 26 October 2015 – The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the cancer agency of the World Health Organization, has evaluated the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat and processed meat.

Red meat

After thoroughly reviewing the accumulated scientific literature, a Working Group of 22 experts from 10 countries convened by the IARC Monographs Programme classified the consumption of red meat as *probably carcinogenic to humans* (Group 2A), based on *limited evidence* that the consumption of red meat causes cancer in humans and *strong* mechanistic evidence supporting a carcinogenic effect.

This association was observed mainly for colorectal cancer, but associations were also seen for pancreatic cancer and prostate cancer.

Processed meat

Processed meat was classified as *carcinogenic to humans* (Group 1), based on *sufficient evidence* in humans that the consumption of processed meat causes colorectal cancer.

Meat consumption and its effects

The consumption of meat varies greatly between countries, with from a few percent up to 100% of people eating red meat, depending on the country, and somewhat lower proportions eating processed meat.

The experts concluded that each 50 gram portion of processed meat eaten daily increases the risk of colorectal cancer by 18%.

“For an individual, the risk of developing colorectal cancer because of their consumption of processed meat remains small, but this risk increases with the amount of meat consumed,” says Dr Kurt Straif, Head of the IARC Monographs Programme. “In view of the large number of people who consume processed meat, the global impact on cancer incidence is of public health importance.”

The IARC Working Group considered more than 800 studies that investigated associations of more than a dozen types of cancer with the consumption of red meat or processed meat in many countries and populations with diverse diets. The most influential evidence came from large prospective cohort studies conducted over the past 20 years.

Public health

”These findings further support current public health recommendations to limit intake of meat,” says Dr Christopher Wild, Director of IARC. “At the same time, red meat has nutritional value. Therefore, these results are important in enabling governments and international regulatory agencies to conduct risk assessments, in order to balance the risks and benefits of eating red meat and processed meat and to provide the best possible dietary recommendations.”

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Note to the Editor:

Red meat refers to all types of mammalian muscle meat, such as beef, veal, pork, lamb, mutton, horse, and goat.

Processed meat refers to meat that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermentation, smoking, or other processes to enhance flavour or improve preservation. Most processed meats contain pork or beef, but processed meats may also contain other red meats, poultry, offal, or meat by-products such as blood.

Examples of processed meat include hot dogs (frankfurters), ham, sausages, corned beef, and biltong or beef jerky as well as canned meat and meat-based preparations and sauces.

A summary of the final evaluations is available online in *The Lancet Oncology*, and the detailed assessments will be published as Volume 114 of the IARC Monographs.

Read the IARC Monographs Q&A

http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/Monographs-Q&A.pdf

Read the IARC Monographs Q&A on the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat and processed meat.

http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/Monographs-Q&A_Vol114.pdf

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The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. Its mission is to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. The Agency is involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and disseminates scientific information through publications, meetings, courses, and fellowships. If you wish your name to be removed from our press release e-mailing list, please write to com@iarc.fr.